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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 THE HAGUE 001109

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/16/2016
TAGS: [KISL](#) [NL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: AYAAN HIRSI ALI: PARLIAMENTARIAN WITHOUT A COUNTRY

REF: "POLITICS IN THE NETHERLANDS" 5/15-16/06

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROLAND ARNALL FOR REASONS 1.5(B) AND (D)

11. (S) SUMMARY: The surprise decision by Dutch Immigration Minister Rita Verdonk to strip maverick parliamentarian Ayaan Hirsi Ali of her Dutch citizenship has sent shock waves through the Netherlands. Hirsi Ali announced on May 16 that she was immediately resigning from parliament. Verdonk's controversial ruling has generated some immediate public support, but could split the VVD -- the party to which both Verdonk and Hirsi Ali belong -- and even threaten the cabinet. If Verdonk's decision is upheld, Hirsi Ali would regain Somali citizenship and refugee status, and could remain in the Netherlands indefinitely; privately, however, she has confirmed that she would like to live and work in the United States. END SUMMARY.

12. (S) As anticipated refs, Dutch parliamentarian and international celebrity Ayaan Hirsi Ali announced at an emotional May 16 press conference her immediate resignation from Parliament. The announcement followed the surprise finding by Minister of Immigration and Integration Rita Verdonk May 15 that Hirsi Ali's naturalization had been acquired fraudulently and therefore was invalid. The fact that Hirsi Ali had falsified information, including her name, when applying for naturalization had long been known to VVD party leaders -- as confirmed by Deputy Prime Minister/Finance Minister Gerrit Zalm, who stood beside Hirsi Ali at her press conference -- but a recent expose by the news program "Zembla" recently focused public attention on the issue. Under Dutch law, Hirsi Ali has six weeks to appeal Verdonk's ruling and has indicated that she will do so. Although the Dutch press reported that she plans to move to the United States within the next few months to accept a job at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), Hirsi Ali refused at her press conference to answer questions about her future plans, other than to note that the loss of her Dutch citizenship had "complicated" her options. In a private meeting with Ambassador Arnall later on May 16, however, she confirmed that she expected shortly to receive a firm job offer from AEI.

13. (C) For Hirsi Ali, the de-naturalization decision was the latest in a string of frustrations, which also included a recent court ruling that she would have to leave her current residence because her neighbors were unhappy with her security arrangements. She had privately hinted for over a year that she would move to the U.S. if she could find an appropriate platform to continue her struggle against religious terror, extremism, and intolerance. Verdonk's hand appears to have been forced by former Minister of Immigration and Integration Hildebrand Nawijn's public demand that Verdonk apply the same standards to Hirsi Ali that she has in similar cases of allegedly fraudulent naturalizations. Nawijn, a former associate of murdered populist leader Pim Fortuyn, may have hoped to embarrass Verdonk and Hirsi Ali while building support for his own nascent far-right

political movement. An informal poll taking by the leading Dutch daily "Telegraaf" indicates that 88 percent of readers believe that Hirsi Ali should not have received Dutch citizenship on the basis of fraudulent information, and opinion was nearly unanimous that immigration regulations should apply equally to everyone, "especially members of parliament."

¶4. (C) According to contacts at the Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service (IND), Hirsi Ali will automatically regain Somali nationality if the invalidation decision is upheld after six weeks. She would also, at that time, automatically return to "refugee status" and have the right to remain in the Netherlands indefinitely; this status would also entitle her to receive a "refugee" passport if she cannot obtain one from another country. While she would be eligible to re-apply for Dutch citizenship, the fact that she falsified information the first time would be taken into consideration.

ANALYSIS:

¶5. (C) By rigidly applying the same standards to Hirsi Ali -- a member of her own party, the VVD -- as to other immigrants, Verdonk reinforces her reputation as the "iron lady" of Dutch politics and could further enhance her standing on the political right. This, in turn, may help her win her hotly contested race against State Secretary for Education Mark Rutte to lead the VVD into elections next May. While the more centrist Rutte continues to enjoy much support among the VVD party membership -- including Hirsi Ali, who recently wrote an op-ed piece in the Dutch daily "Volkskrant" signaling support for Rutte -- most observers believe that

THE HAGUE 00001109 002 OF 002

Verdonk would be the more effective vote-getter nationally.

¶6. (C) On the other hand, Verdonk's decision to de-naturalize an outspoken defender of individual rights angered many prominent VVD members, including former leader Jozias van Aartsen, European Commissioner Neelie Kroes, and Foreign Policy Spokesman Hans van Baalen, in addition to Zalm. Even many politicians who disapprove of Hirsi Ali's confrontational style object to the ruling, and believe it will seriously damage the Netherlands' reputation for tolerance and openness. At its party congress on May 13, for example, junior coalition partner D-66 passed a motion condemning Verdonk's inflexibility with regard to several thousand asylum seekers and refugees currently facing possible deportation. There seems little doubt that Hirsi Ali's departure from politics will become a major election-year issue; at a minimum, it will widen existing splits within the VVD on questions of immigration and integration, and could also create serious rifts within the cabinet and governing coalition. Deputy PM/Finance Minister Gerrit Zalm, who joined Hirsi Ali at her press conference, informed reporters that he expected the cabinet this week to look at how Verdonk's decision was taken and to consider whether it can be reversed.

¶7. (C) Nawijn, meanwhile, will continue to force the government to confront the potentially embarrassing consequences of its policies. For example, on May 16, Nawijn asked Verdonk to investigate the circumstances under which Green Left MP Farah Karimi was naturalized. Karimi, an Iranian immigrant who once belonged to the Mojahideen al-Khalq, has also acknowledged in published interviews that she was not completely truthful about her background when she applied for citizenship. Following Hirsi Ali's press conference, Green Left called for an immediate debate in Parliament on the issue.

ARNALL